



Danish Centre for
Prevention of Extremism

Knowledge synthesis - synopsis

MAPPING OF KNOWLEDGE ON PREVENTION OF EXTREMISM

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Background to the knowledge synthesis

The Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism (referred to below as the Centre) has commissioned a knowledge mapping initiative which aims to map the current best knowledge as regards extremism and radicalisation and prevention of these¹. A knowledge synthesis that summarises the most important knowledge in the field has been prepared on this basis. This synopsis provides a general overview of the most important conclusions and points contained in the synthesis.

What is a knowledge synthesis?

A knowledge synthesis is a summary of the currently best available knowledge in a specific field. This knowledge synthesis summarises knowledge as regards extremism and the prevention of extremism that is of relevance from a Danish prevention perspective. The knowledge synthesis also describes the strength and character of the knowledge identified in the field. The knowledge synthesis is based on a review of 65 selected publications.

The knowledge synthesis is primarily aimed at professionals in Denmark such as SSP consultants (SSP refers to a partnership between school social services and police), police officers working with crime prevention, the PSP cooperation (PSP refers to a partnership between the psychiatric services, social services and police), and others. The intention is to provide professionals with a stronger knowledge base for their work. At the same time, the synthesis should strengthen the knowledge base for the outward-facing advisory initiatives for municipalities and professionals working with prevention of extremism.

From a Danish prevention perspective, a number of choices have been made in relation to the focus and delimitation of the knowledge synthesis. Therefore, under no circumstances are knowledge of extremism and prevention of extremism covered in full. Instead, the synthesis sets out the knowledge that is most relevant to explore from the Danish approach to prevention.

In specific terms, this synopsis focuses on knowledge of prevention of extremism, while a similar synopsis has been compiled which focuses on knowledge of extremism. Reading the full knowledge synthesis is recommended in order to derive the most benefit from the knowledge gathered.

Have an interesting read!

¹ The knowledge mapping has been prepared by Rambøll Management Consulting in 2017-18.

Definition of extremism and radicalisation

Extremism and radicalisation are two key terms in the synthesis. The understanding of the two terms follows the understanding specified in the government's national action plan of 2016 on the prevention of extremism and radicalisation.

Extremism refers to persons or groups that commit or seek to legitimise violence or other illegal acts, with reference to societal conditions that they disagree with. The term covers e.g. left-wing extremism, right-wing extremism and Islamist extremism.

Radicalisation refers to a short- or long-term process where persons subscribe to extremist views or legitimise their actions on the basis of extremist ideologies

Source: *National action plan on prevention of extremism and radicalisation, 2016.*

For the sake of simplicity, 'prevention of extremism and radicalisation' is designated 'prevention of extremism' in the synthesis.

General synthesis

A variety of initiatives and approaches are all involved in prevention of extremism. The various approaches all maintain long-term focus on prevention of extremism. However, there is no knowledge that documents the effects of specific initiatives. Instead, knowledge focuses on initiatives and results that may potentially reinforce the prevention effort.

Seven preventive approaches have been highlighted that can be divided into three different target groups:

- **Approaches aimed at individuals** who are deemed to be at risk of radicalisation at an early preventive level, an anticipatory level or a direct intervention level. Three preventive approaches have been identified here: A. development of knowledge and capacity among individuals, B. information on extremism and the consequences of extremism, and C. support and guidance at vulnerable stages of life.
- **Approaches aimed at citizens' social surroundings**, i.e. individuals' families, their close networks, the local community surrounding individuals or society in general. Two preventive approaches have been identified: A. Involvement of family and network and B. involvement of the local community.
- **Approaches aimed at professionals** who work with the preventive initiative to prevent extremism and radicalisation. Two preventive approaches have been identified: A. development of capacity among professionals and B. new educational and pedagogical methods, used by teachers and educationalists in particular.



The general knowledge synthesis is expanded upon in greater detail on pages 34-35 in the full version of the knowledge synthesis.

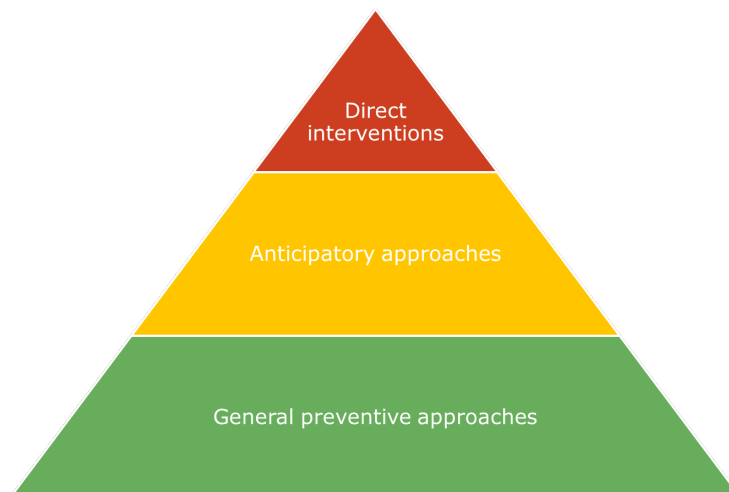
Knowledge landscape

Besides summing up the most important knowledge, another purpose of the knowledge synthesis has been to describe the knowledge landscape in the field. The knowledge landscape shows areas where knowledge is solid, areas where knowledge is less solid, and areas where there is a need for more knowledge. There is a general need for more knowledge, particularly on the impact of initiatives and measures in relation to extremism.

In general, the knowledge landscape is characterised by limited knowledge of prevention of extremism. This is due in particular to the fact that it is difficult to gain direct access to extremist environments, and hence it is difficult to examine the impact of initiatives.

In a Danish context, the prevention pyramid is one tool used for prevention of extremism. However, this pyramid is not generally used as a framework or tool in the literature, particularly not outside Denmark. Most of the knowledge in the pyramid relates to the early preventive level, in particular initiatives in the context of schools and local communities. A certain amount of knowledge has also been identified with regard to initiatives at the anticipatory level, while there is less knowledge about initiatives at the direct intervention level. As regards the target group for the initiatives (individuals themselves, individuals' social surroundings and professionals), most knowledge relates to initiatives that are targeted at individuals themselves. In an early preventive context, there is knowledge of initiatives targeted at citizens' social surroundings or groups, such as initiatives aiming to reinforce citizenship. At the same time, there is less knowledge of initiatives at the anticipatory and direct intervention levels focusing on individuals' families and networks.

The fact that the literature on prevention of extremism is characterised by limited knowledge about the effects and the impact of initiatives is an important point to bear in mind. Most publications focus on activities and short-term results of initiatives. A few studies, particularly at the direct intervention level, measure impact in greater detail.



Knowledge of initiatives targeted at individuals

Initiatives targeted at individuals are initiatives focusing on individuals or groups of individuals at risk of radicalisation. These initiatives may help to build up a sense of citizenship among children and young people, and they may assist individuals in disengagement from extremist environments. That said, a number of initiatives focus on creating greater awareness of the consequences of extremism. There is evidence of short-term results that are believed to reinforce prevention of extremism, but no actual impact from these initiatives.

Development of knowledge and capacity among individuals

The development of knowledge and capacity approach focuses on increasing individuals' knowledge with regard to a specific topic, typically focusing on children and young people. Initiatives relating to development of knowledge and capacity frequently aim to reinforce children's democratic and social skills and thereby promote their citizenship.

With some knowledge, it is emphasised that an early initiative targeted at development of resilience and critical reflection may have a preventive effect. Among other things, early initiatives may be implemented by means of teaching at schools, teaching children and young people about critical thinking or democratic values such as tolerance and recognition.

Early preventive activities may be underpinned by a discussion-based approach. If teaching takes place in a room where open dialogue and discussion are permitted, this will help to stimulate young people's involvement and ability to learn. It is also useful to work on the basis of children's and young people's interests; by means of cases on social media, for example.

Digital Citizenship: an example of knowledge and capacity development

The British Digital Citizenship initiative is based on a workshop where students are given the knowledge and tools to recognise and deal with online propaganda and manipulation on social media. This initiative is based on actual examples and scenarios relating to online radicalisation, thereby attempting to make it easier for students to relate to it.

You can find out more about Digital Citizenship in Reynolds, Louis & Ralph Scott (2015): Digital citizens: countering extremism online.

Information on extremism and the consequences of extremism

Some initiatives seek to draw attention to the consequences of extremism by providing information. This may, for example, involve using counternarratives that offer an alternative account to the extremist narrative while also to break down and replace the ideas and notions offered by the extremist narrative.

There is no consensus on whether counternarratives work, and if so how. Some literature points out that counternarratives may influence young people and adults, persuading them to reflect critically to a greater extent on their own opinions and the consequences of extremist acts for others.

Conversely, counternarratives may have the opposite effect as they may help to stigmatise or create polarisation. Among other things, counternarratives can give an impression that anything beyond the norm is negative. Therefore, it may be better to work actively on the individual's participation in society and reinforce skills that may initially prevent the attraction to extremism.

Support and guidance at vulnerable stages of life

According to some publications, support and guidance at vulnerable stages of life help to steer individuals away from extremist environments. In this context, there are good experiences with mentoring efforts that can help disadvantaged individuals at risk of extremism or may provide support to individuals who want to disengage themselves from extremist environments.

Mentoring efforts are offered in a number of countries, where the mentor works directly with the mentee's motivation and opportunity to make positive changes. Support and guidance from a mentor provides the individual with motivation to choose a positive direction in life and develop new, positive social links with the surrounding society.

In some initiatives, former extremists act as mentors. Personal experience appears in particular to reinforce these efforts, if the mentor is capable of reflecting on his/her own experiences when providing guidance. Hence it is also important for mentors to undergo qualification ahead of the initiative.

The Swedish EXIT programme: an example of support and guidance at vulnerable stages of life

The Swedish EXIT programme implements a targeted initiative to assist right-wing extremists with disengagement. This programme comprises mentoring efforts and therapy sessions. The therapy sessions focus on dealing with the emotions that the individual experiences during the disengagement process. During the mentoring initiative, mentor and mentee have weekly contact and the mentor provides support and guidance. Some mentors are themselves former members of right-wing extremist groups, and they bring their own experiences into their guidance and support.

You can find out more about the Swedish EXIT programme in Christensen, Tina Wilchen (2015): A Question of Participation – Disengagement from the Extremist Right, A case study from Sweden.

More information on knowledge of initiatives targeted at individuals can be found on pages 37-47 in the full version of the knowledge synthesis.

Knowledge of initiatives targeted at citizens' social surroundings

Initiatives and approaches targeted at citizens' social surroundings focus on the close network and surroundings in which individuals at risk of extremism find themselves. Involvement of the individual's family and initiatives in the local community may reinforce the effort to counter extremism. However, there is no evidence of these initiatives having a clear effect on knowledge of how they work, particularly as regards initiatives in the local community.

Involvement of family and network

Some knowledge highlights the fact that involving the family and network can have a positive impact in the prevention effort. Involving the family and network should help the young person or adult to choose a more positive pathway in life by providing motivation and support for their choices going forward.

The reinforced social ties with family and network may help both individuals who are at risk of radicalisation and individuals who are already part of extremist environments to disengage and embark upon more stable lives, with positive relationships.

The family can act as a supporting function that helps to keep the individual away from extremist environments. Hence there have been good experiences with qualifying parents, aiming to reinforce their ability to deal with their children's risk behaviour and movement towards extremism. This may involve discussions with the parents or in network groups, allowing parents to share their experiences and talk about their fears.

The parental coaching initiative: an example of involvement of family and network

The Danish parental coaching initiative works on the basis of a concept whereby the parents act as a positive resource in efforts to prevent risk behaviour among young people in relation to radicalisation. Typically, this initiative involves assigning a trained coach to parents. This coach works specifically with the parents and focuses on the solution using discussion and coaching techniques. The coach focuses on helping the parents to resolve the conflicts that they experience due to the young person's risk behaviour.

You can find out more about the parental coaching initiative in Oxford Research (2016): Slutevaluering af 'Helhedsorienteret forebyggelse af ekstremisme'.af 'Helhedsorienteret forebyggelse af ekstremisme'.

Involvement of the local community

The *involvement of the local community* approach focuses on involving and working in cooperation with local stakeholders and individuals such as local institutions, leaders, civil society or individuals. In this regard, the local community becomes an active player in preventive work in the local area.

It is not clear whether involvement of the local community works. On the one hand, there is no evidence of a definite effect from initiatives in local community, and so whether these initiatives assist with the preventive initiatives, and if so how, is uncertain.

On the other hand, radicalisation and recruitment typically take place locally, and so local stakeholders can help to identify signs of concern and thereby help to prevent extremism. Some literature views this against the background of a need to reinforce cooperation with local stakeholders and individuals in the prevention effort.

Some publications point out that the best way to prevent extremism in the local community is to create strong social relationships and partnerships in the local community. The social relationships are crucial to the resilience and cohesion of the local community. Local partnerships can also help to ensure the sustainability of the initiatives implemented as local stakeholders keep them going.

Young Muslim Leadership: an example of involvement of the local community

In the UK, the purpose of the Young Muslim Leadership project is to develop a broader intercultural understanding and offer young people the tools and knowledge they need to counteract extremist opinions. A series of civic citizenship workshops are specifically held in the local area with a view to persuading young people to get involved. These discuss problems with extremism in the local area and focus on qualifying young people with a view to helping them become leaders who are capable of identifying and tackling extremist opinions.

You can find out more about Young Muslim Leadership in Pratchett, Lawrence, Leila Thorp, Melvin Wingfield, Vivian Lowndes & Ruby Jabbar (2010): Preventing Support for Violent Extremism through Community Interventions: A Review of the Evidence.

More information on knowledge of initiatives targeted at citizens' social surroundings can be found on pages 47-54 in the full version of the knowledge synthesis.

Knowledge of initiatives targeted at professionals

Approaches and initiatives aimed at professionals are targeted at staff who drive the prevention effort. This may include teachers, social workers, caseworkers, therapists and prison staff. Skilling may help professionals to deliver a stronger preventive initiative. At the same time, innovative new educational and pedagogical methods may strengthen children's and young people's resilience against extremism.

Capacity development among professionals

Some of the knowledge views professional qualifying and capacity development as a potential driving force in the prevention effort. In the case of capacity development, the emphasis on reinforcing local preventive stakeholders' abilities to prevent, identify and deal with problems involving extremism.

The capacity development approach may be targeted at a number of different professionals, and these measures typically include courses and presentations relating to signs of concern and radicalisation processes. Upskilling may involve specialist knowledge, but also specific methods that support the detection and identification of individuals at risk of radicalisation.

There is no consensus on whether capacity development works. On the one hand, capacity development may mean that professional deliver higher quality in the prevention effort, respect of both early detection and management of signs of concern. On the other hand, capacity development may have an adverse impact as some professionals experience a dilemma when it comes to doing their jobs while also remaining alert to potential signs of concern.

Advising and qualifying local stakeholders: an example of capacity development among professionals

In Denmark, a nationwide initiative is taking place in order to advise and qualify municipal resource persons with regard to the prevention effort, typically from the SSP cooperation. This initiative comprises five sub-initiatives which involve – among other things – regional network groups of SSP contact and resource persons and qualification of other stakeholders such as teachers in primary and secondary education and club workers, street level workers and hotspot workers.

You can find out more about the initiative relating to the advising and qualification of local stakeholders in Cowi (2014): [Evaluering af indsatsen for at forebygge ekstremisme og radikalisering](#).

New educational and pedagogical methods

According to some publications, there is preventive potential in specific educational and pedagogical methods. This approach focuses primarily on teachers and educationalists and relates to specific and innovative changes and measures in educational practice that may help to prevent risk behaviour.

Innovative educational and pedagogical methods may help professionals to become more skilled at reinforcing democratic values and tolerance of the opinions of others among young people, while also promoting their self-confidence and self-esteem.

The new educational and pedagogical methods are presented in a number of forms; including the qualification of teachers when it comes to conveying knowledge, facilitating discussion and dealing with potential issues related to radicalisation. This may also be in the form of creative and innovative approaches to teaching by using media-based activities such as film and teaching on social media, for example.

Dembra: an example of new educational methods

Dembra is a Norwegian course assigned to teachers and headteachers at continuation schools. Democratic preparedness, intercultural issues and how the school's democratic value base can be incorporated in the curricula are key themes of the course. This course is linked to a curriculum that teachers can use in their work. This material aims to give teachers the skills they need to develop civic citizenship and promote democratic opinions among young people.

You can find out more about Dembra described in Lenz, Claudia & Ida Kjeøy (2014): Dembra evalueringsrapport 2013-2015

More information on knowledge of initiatives targeted at professionals can be found on pages 54-60 in the full version of the knowledge synthesis.

Where can I find out more?

You can find out more about the results of the knowledge mapping effort here:

- The **knowledge synthesis** summarises in a readily accessible manner the mapped knowledge of extremism and the prevention of extremism. The individual topics are described in greater detail in the knowledge synthesis, with sources and examples. The knowledge synthesis also includes a general characteristic of the knowledge landscape in the field.
- A **knowledge catalogue** that summarises the studies that form a basis for the knowledge synthesis. This knowledge catalogue provides a more in-depth insight into each individual publication.
- **Synopsis on knowledge of extremism:** A synopsis has been compiled, in the same way as this synopsis, on the main conclusions for knowledge of extremism.

All of these products can be read as extensions of one another, or individually with emphasis on specific themes.

You can also find out more about extremism and its prevention at the website of the Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism: www.stopekstremisme.dk

Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism

The Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism was established in 2017 as part of the social financing agreement. The purpose of the Centre is to reinforce the Danish initiative for prevention of extremism and radicalisation at a national, local and online level. The Centre therefore underpins preventive work among municipalities, regions, crime prevention partnerships, education institutions, housing associations, community activities, etc.

The Centre aims to promote the use of a knowledge-based preventive initiative and help to ensure fast and targeted involvement in cases where there is a risk of radicalisation. The Centre offers advice on the development of action plans for prevention of extremism, guidance for professionals on possible ways of dealing with signs of concern, and skills enhancement courses, frequently in cooperation with other stakeholders. The Centre is also implementing a series of method development projects and offers specific tools such as mentors, parental coaches and young discussion instigators.

The Centre is part of the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration under the Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration.

Find out more about the Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism at stopekstremisme.dk

Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism

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